

# Montour Locomotives

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad used a variety of locomotive power in its 100-plus year history.

The first locomotive on the Montour was built by the American Locomotive Co. in 1879. It was a small 0-4-0 type used to haul coal from the Cliff Mine to a loading on the Ohio River at Coraopolis, and was lettered "Cliff Mine".

The second locomotive was a slightly larger 2-4-2 type built in 1880 and lettered for the Partridge Mine near Imperial.

The three-number designations denote the wheel arrangement on locomotives. The first is the number of small wheels under the front of the locomotive. The second is the number of driving wheels and the third number indicates the small wheels at the rear, under the cab of the engine. With two wheels on each axle, you would see half the number of the designation when looking at a locomotive. The 2-4-2 "Partridge Mine" would thus show one small wheel in front, two larger drive wheels and one small wheel at the rear of the locomotive.



**Montour #3, the 2-4-2 "Partridge Mine" was the second locomotive purchased by the Montour Railroad. Alco Historic Photos.**

In the 1890's, a few more locomotives were acquired, including a 4-6-0 built in 1889, which led most of the Montour's passenger trains until that service was ended in 1927 and this locomotive was retired.

In the early 1900's, as coal tonnage increased, the Montour needed more power, so ten Consolidation type 2-8-0 engines were bought from other railroads over a several year period.

When the Mifflin Extension was constructed in 1914, several new coal mines were opened, increasing the coal tonnage to a new level. Larger, more powerful locomotives were needed, and 16 Mikado type 2-8-2's built by the American Locomotive Company were purchased new in 1915-16. An additional nine used Mikados were bought from other railroads. These 148 ton locomotives served as the Montour's main power until all steam was retired in the early 1950's. Hauling heavily loaded coal hoppers, the Mikados were sometimes used in pairs by double-heading a train, or were used as a pusher on the rear of a train climbing the hills on the railroad.



**Montour #26 was a 2-8-2 Mikado type built in 1916. Weighing 148 tons, “Mikes” were the main power on the Montour for nearly 40 years.**

**Photo courtesy David Nagel.**

In the late 1940's, the Montour Railroad began giving thought to the purchase of diesel locomotives. Management determined that using several smaller locomotives on each train would give them a better return by offering more total power and traction, as well as protection in case of a locomotive failure, so they decided on the 1200 hp model SW-7 and SW-9 manufactured by EMD, the ElectroMotive Division of General Motors.

Starting in 1950, fifteen of these diesels were purchased new, with a sixteenth added from another railroad. The diesels had the advantage of being used in multiple unit consists, where one engineer could control multiple units. These were the most common of the locomotives pictured on the Montour Railroad, serving until their retirement in 1981.



**Working together as multiple units, SW-9's ruled the main line for 30 years.  
Photo by E. Roy Ward, Jr.**

When the SW's were nearing retirement, larger 2000 hp locomotives were tested on the Montour, but due to the hilly and curvy trackage, these locomotives could not haul enough cars to justify their additional cost. Despite their lower horsepower, the smaller locomotives provided more traction and power when used as multiple unit consists.

After the original SW's were retired, 1500 hp model engines from their parent company, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR, were used on the Montour until operations ceased in the mid 1980's.

This column appeared in the May-June, 2015 Montour Trail Newsletter.  
For more information on the Montour Trail – go to [www.montourtrail.org](http://www.montourtrail.org)